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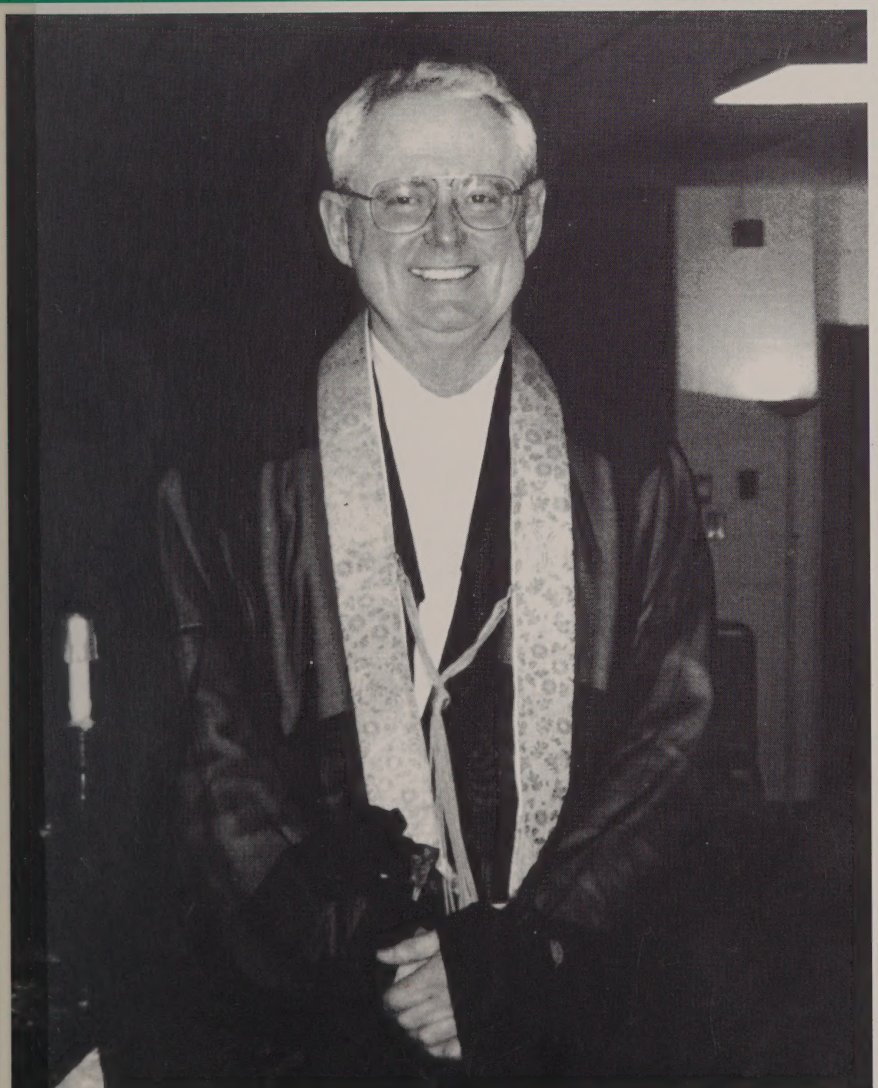
SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ AUGUST 1998

SACRED JOURNEY™

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit

of unity among humankind.

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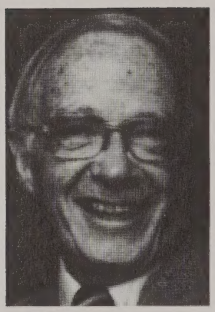
Cover photo by: Annie Potts

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Today, increasing numbers of us are traveling spiritual journeys guided by truths, insights, and practices from more than one faith tradition and more than one way of knowing.

Without necessarily bailing out of the religious structures of our childhood, we are no longer willing to accept without doubt or question the religion of the authorities. We tend to look more deeply into our own hearts, minds, and souls for guidance on issues of morals, beliefs, and practices. We find that our faith and belief in the existence and nature of Ultimate Reality are strengthened by examining our own experiences, needs, hopes, and beliefs, in the light of the insights and practices of other seekers throughout space and time.

When I'm asked if I'm a Christian, or a Buddhist, for example, I'm tempted to reply as did Thich Nhat Hanh, the well-known Vietnamese Zen master, poet, scholar, and peace activist. When asked if he was a Buddhist, he said "No." Asked to explain, he replied that he was not what the questioner meant, or had in mind, when he used the word "Buddhist." When asked if he was a Christian, an equally well-known practitioner of that faith answered, "You'll have to tell me."

Our actions, when we leave our meditation cushions or church pews and move out into the streets, are a good indication of whether we're "walking the walk" or just "talking the talk."

We can't, of course, all be Mother Teresa or Thich Nhat Hanh. They have their callings, and you and I have ours. And how we practice what we think we believe is determined in large part by our upbringing and our spiritual temperaments.

You may, by nature, be drawn primarily to a highly devotional religious practice; or to an intellectual understanding of Ultimate Reality; or to a highly activist engagement with the world in pursuit of peace and social justice; or to a contemplative practice seeking union with the divine source of all life. You may well combine more than one of those paths in your own practice, which can only be enriched and strengthened by the spiritual longings and discoveries of other seekers.

Each of those Ways is available in all of the major faith traditions—however difficult it may be to hear or learn about them—and we hope that by publishing the insights and experiences of women and men with different ways of relating to the divine, we may help you find the path that's right for you.

You'll find you have lots of companions on the path, many of whom you'll meet in the pages of this journal, and you'll discover that at heart they all share your deepest longings. As Michael Lerner tells us in his exciting and inspiring book, *Jewish Renewal*:

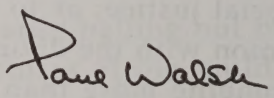
> There is a power, a presence, a force in the universe—indefinable, unknowable —that pulls us toward transcendence.

That tremendous creative and healing power, or presence, is what many of us call God, or Ultimate Reality.

Its nature is kindness, compassion and love—in all its forms and manifestations.

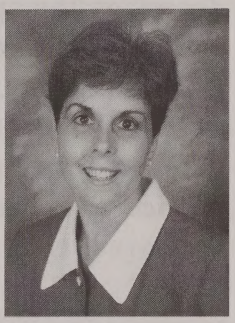
At heart, our deepest desire is to realize our oneness with that power, that transcendent reality that is both within us, at the core of our being, and all around us, saturating every part of this sacred universe.

May your sacred journey bring you ever closer to that reality.



Paul Walsh

FROM THE EDITOR



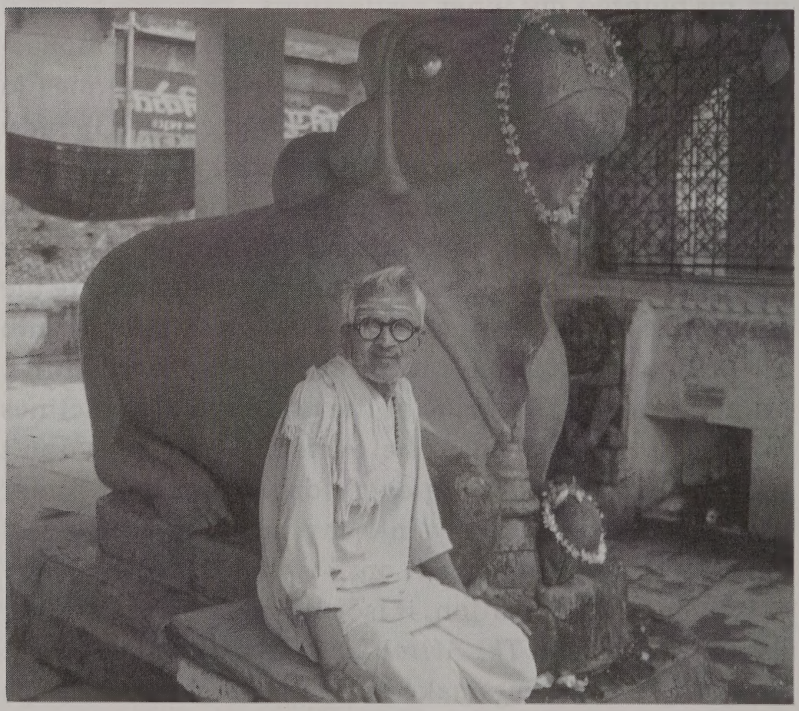
During fifteen years working in religious publishing, I have met practitioners of many faith traditions. I've found inspiration and challenge in others' disciplines, quietude, and worship. The silence and order of the first Zen Center I visited in California pinpointed my inner restlessness. Day-long Easter Vigils in a Ukrainian Catholic monastery opened up the romantic and sensorial avenues to divine mystery. Short visits to bustling, colorful Hindu temples in India revealed my deeply ingrained Protestant, Christian ideas of what worship looks, smells, and sounds like. Weekend retreats taught me the necessity of solitude and how daily spiritual rhythms liberate the spirit. But then I always return home and relapse into my ordinary life. I don't meditate with the early birds. I don't follow a strict rule of life as do the Benedictines to great reward. And to be perfectly honest, I don't like to do the same thing every day. I naturally prefer to stir some spontaneity into my morning coffee and detour off the beaten path on my way to work.

Given my disposition, it is little wonder that Parker Palmer's words in *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity and Caring* make me want to cheer. Perhaps rather than being a spiritual misfit, I am simply a right-

brained kind of pilgrim.

Parker writes, "I thrive on the vitality and variety of the world of action. I value spontaneity more than predictability, exuberance more than order, inner freedom more than the authority of tradition, the challenge of dialogue more than the guidance of a rule, eccentricity rather than staying on dead center." Palmer describes the spiritual life of "contemplation-and-action." Action without contemplation becomes frenzy. Contemplation without action becomes escapist. Most of us have clear leanings in one direction or another, yet our desire for wholeness may beckon us toward untried avenues of prayer and service.

Michael Christensen

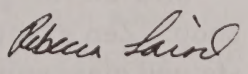


Hindu temple in Calcutta, India

In our feature this month, Robert E. Kennedy, Jesuit priest and Zen master, describes how he turned to a wisdom tradition that offers him a "new way of being Catholic." Jeanette Blonigen Clancy writes in "Christ Within" that "when we look at our religion from the perspective of other religions, we can see our own more clearly." In *A Transforming Experience,* Antoinette Bosco, a mother grieving terrible losses, finds her place of healing alongside Jerusalem's wailing wall. In *Spiritual Practice,* Pema Chodron, one of today's most sought-after Buddhist teachers, offers "Tonglen Instruction," a way of deepening compassion. Jerome Smith and his daughter find insight along the seashore, while John Oliver makes *Pilgrimage* to an ancient Russian Orthodox monastery. Our *Prayers* range from "Psalm of the Unsure Believer" and "Source of All Being" written by Carol Siemering and Julie Keefer, two of our readers, to centuries-old Jewish and Muslim prayers. Poet Catherine Miklitsch finds nourishment for her soul in "Morning."

One of my favorite authors, Rachel Naomi Remen writes, "I suspect that life itself may be a spiritual practice." After reading this issue, you may think so, too.

Blessings,



Rebecca Laird

Palmer's book is published by HarperCollins and Rachel Naomi Remen's book, Kitchen Table Wisdom, *is available through Riverhead Books.*

The Way of Robert E. Kennedy

Rebecca Laird

A sell-out crowd, twenty-five hundred strong, gathered under a circus-sized tent on a rainy spring day for Convocation '98 sponsored by the Center for Theological and Spiritual Development at the College of St. Elizabeth in Morristown, New Jersey. I had come to see and hear Robert Kennedy, a Jesuit priest, college professor, and Zen Roshi (master), one of the day's workshop leaders.

In the morning session Joyce Rupp, Catholic sister and author, mentioned a trip to Japan and the temple at Kamakura to see the famous statue of the Buddha. Where had I heard of Kamakura before? Ah yes, I had read of Kamakura in *Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit* by Robert Kennedy who had studied there with Yamada Roshi, his first Zen teacher. Synchronicity was afoot.

Mid-morning, I headed toward Kennedy's workshop: "Zen's Gift to Christianity." In a room lined with stained glass windows, Robert Kennedy looked the part of the sage—silver-haired, bespectacled, and composed. His erect posture and somber presence reminded me of a phrase from his book: the goal of a Zen teacher is to "empty the student's head of theory, sit him on a cushion, and pour some steel into his spine."

Kennedy instructed the fifty of us in the room to sit

up straight, breathe deeply, slowly, and still our minds. For several minutes, this group of strangers sat in silence interrupted by occasional coughs and some nervous fidgeting. A gong sounded and Kennedy spoke briefly, then soon said, "Let's sit some more." Sit, breathe, stillness. This process was repeated again before the hour had ended.

Without announcing it as a goal, the workshop introduced the basics of Zen practice. The wise teacher, by design, led us in two basic Zen practices: *zazen*—meditative sitting, and *teisho*—talks by a teacher to prod the listener toward understanding. When asked curiosity questions or doctrinal queries, Kennedy responded with questions of his own. Kennedy modeled what he writes in his book: "Always the teacher nudges the student away from the shallows into the middle of life." For students in search of absolutes, the teacher focuses on the relative. Those insisting on holiness receive a reminder of the secular. No packaged answers are offered. Instead, teaching is meant as a way of exposing illusions.

A few weeks later, Paul Walsh, president of Fellowship in Prayer, and I visited Robert Kennedy at the Morning Star Zendo, a serene, simple gathering place located in a second-floor condominium in the heart of bustling Jersey City. Here, we were privileged to meet with the Roshi and question him at length about his own sacred journey and how his Zen practice and Catholic faith strengthen and support each other. We met American-style, seated in chairs, separated by a comfortable table-width, over tea.

Face to Face

Robert Kennedy, raised in Brooklyn in an Irish Catholic

enclave and educated in parochial schools, first traveled to Japan as a missionary. He was ordained a priest in Tokyo just as Vatican II reforms swept away the tried-and-true form of Catholic life that he knew, loved, and depended upon.

"It's ironic," he said, "but during a time when I lost my way in prayer and was looking for a firm foundation for my faith, I first encountered Zen, a tradition that doesn't distinguish the sacred from the secular and that knows that there is no firm foundation either."

In 1976, after graduate studies in Canada, Father Kennedy returned to Japan as a pilgrim on sabbatical. For a year he sought out Jesuits who were in dialogue with Zen masters and devoted himself to meet with and pray with these teachers.

In Kamakura he met Yamada Roshi.

"During my first visit with Yamada Roshi he asked me, 'Jesus emptied himself, yes?' I agreed.""Then Yamada Roshi told me, 'I am not trying to make you a Buddhist, but to empty you in imitation of your Lord Jesus Christ.'

"For a year I traveled from Tokyo to Kamakura and Yamada Roshi never asked me about my faith or what I believed. He asked me how I sat, breathed, and saw the world around me."

When asked if sitting with Zen masters makes him a Buddhist or if he still considers himself to be Catholic, Kennedy acknowledges that Zen has shown him "a new way of being Catholic," but he doesn't answer this as an either/or question. Zen, rather than being viewed as a religion, is better understood as a way of seeing life, a way of being human, a path to self-knowledge.

Kennedy is quick to point out that Zen is not another activity that simply can be added on to Chris-

Tom Dunham

tianity for self-improvement purposes. Nor is Zen something to incorporate without acknowledging its dangers. Like all spiritual practices it can be distorted. It also arose from Chinese Buddhism in the late Sixth Century, and while culturally adapted in later times and places, it continues to ask different questions and offer different answers than those offered by Christianity. Neither is Zen just another word for contemplative prayer, although it is here, in a wordless state of detachment, that practitioners from Catholic and Buddhist traditions find a meeting place. Citing Catholic luminaries like St. John of the Cross, the unnamed author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and Thomas Merton, Kennedy explains: "true mystics, when they come face-to-face with God, encounter a wall of nothing-

ness, a night to the soul, and a void that is empty of all thoughts and images." In the place of emptiness the ego retreats and the Kingdom of God for Christians, the "no-self" in Zen, is realized.

One practices Zen, then, to realize one's true nature and to free the mind from images and ideas. After one becomes practiced at emptying the mind, the student is given a koan—a word trap, incomprehensible to the rational mind but a tool to enlightenment when embraced with one's whole being.

Kennedy writes of the koan used most throughout the centuries: A monk seriously asked his master, "Has a dog the Buddha-nature or not?" The master retorted, "Mu."

"Mu" is a meaningless sound that thrusts the truth before the student willing to eat, walk, sleep, and become "mu." And in becoming one with a meaningless sound the Buddha-nature is revealed.

Our interview ended and with my mind still puzzling, we retired upstairs to the Jesuit dining room overlooking the Hudson for lunch. I drove home suspecting I'd just played a poetic game of cat and mouse. A curious editor in search of easy answers is like a hungry cat who spies it's dinner and readies to pounce. But the answer, like a scurrying mouse, appears long enough to whet the appetite, but disappears again, leaving the cat to practice keeping perfectly still, fully attentive, breathing without effort, eyes half-closed, ready for the enlightened moment and for lunch.

To have the Zen experience for yourself, contact the Morning Star Zendo, which offers daily, weekly, and monthly zazen *(sitting meditation) which is open to all. Inquire through Charles Lunnin, guestmaster, 50 Glenwood Ave. #205, Jersey City, New Jersey 07306. Check out www.kennedyzen.com online.*

Miracle in the Holy Land

Antoinette Bosco

In early 1994 I needed a heavy dose of help to get me out of a killing emotional slump that had been brought on by the dual loss of children. My twenty-seven-year-old son Peter had committed suicide after an eleven-year struggle with a brain disorder that had created such a 'psych-ache' in him that he could no longer bear the pain. On March 18, 1991, he put a gun to his head and, in a note left to me, asked me to be happy for him, for now his pain was gone and he was "home."

At first I thought I'd die, too. I missed him so and felt such anger that I had not been able to "fix it" for him. A mother always believes that she can help her children, and I, a mother of seven, was no different. I felt so defeated that my child had had what turned out to be a fatal mental illness, and I had been unable to help him heal. If it hadn't been for the love of my

Antoinette Bosco is a syndicated columnist for Washington-based Catholic News Service, and author of six books. This story is included in Coincidences: Touched by a Miracle, *recently published by Twenty-Third Publications.*

family and my Christian faith, I think I might have given in to despair.

I had been struggling for two years to try to find a path to peace in my own heart and soul when I received an even more devastating blow. My son, John, and his wife, Nancy, were found murdered, blown away by a nine-millimeter gun as they slept in their newly acquired home in Montana. It was four agonizing months before we knew who had killed them. It turned out to be the eighteen-year-old son of the people from whom they had purchased their home, an honor student named Joseph Shadow Clark. I tormented myself asking, "What could have turned an eighteen-year-old into a killer?" He never gave a motive for his deadly act which exploded my heart.

A God-force moved me to look where I would find a place of healing.

I was determined not to give up on life, and so I worked, prayed, wrote, and smiled. On the surface I looked fine. I appeared to be functioning well. But my internal torment only increased as I thought constantly of my two beautiful sons who left this world so violently. I knew I was constantly falling back into mourning, and I didn't want my life to be stuck in that searing place.

In late January of 1994, I went to Florida for a week's vacation to begin preparing for the third anniversary of Peter's death. Anniversaries of tragedies are especially traumatic because they bring the event back too realistically. I spent a good deal of my time there on a beach reading a book on the origins of Christian spirituality. The more I read, the more I felt drawn to

wanting to experience the place where Jesus' story unfolded, where his message was first heard.

When I got back home, I told my family that I really wanted to go to the Holy Land to walk where Jesus walked. Of course, that was a pipe dream. I didn't have the time or the money to do that.

That was a Saturday. On Monday I went back to work. I was then the executive editor of a Connecticut newspaper. Around ten o'clock that morning I got a phone call from an acquaintance who works for the Ministry of Tourism in Israel. She said. "Toni, get ready to go to the Holy Land."

I nearly fell off my chair. Was she some kind of psychic mind reader? She went on to tell me that a historic conference of Christian and Jewish religious and academic leaders from around the world, a first ever, was going to take place in Jerusalem the first week of February. Would I like to go, include a tour of the Holy Land, and write about this in my syndicated column for Catholic News Service? "Tanya, are you offering me a free trip to the Holy Land?" I asked. She said "Yes." I gasped, and said "Yes! I'll go!"

I knew this had to be more than a chance coincidence. The hand of God was clearly involved. I went to Jerusalem, had a fabulous, joyful experience from the conference, seeing so many old wounds healed between Christians and Jews, and I wrote many wonderful stories upon my return.

But there was much more. On the tour that was included with the five-day trip, our bus driver took us to the Western Wall, which used to be called the Wailing Wall, the last remnant of the destroyed Temple courtyard and the holiest shrine for the Jewish people. I walked to the side of the wall where the women

prayed and felt inspired as I saw so many young Jewish women reading their prayers from Hebrew prayer books. Many of them at the wall would place their hands on the stones, petitioning the Lord in prayer.

I decided to pray as they did, and so I walked to the wall and raised my arms putting the palms of my hands on the stones. I thought of the mothers down through the centuries who had prayed at this wall for their dead sons, and suddenly I started to cry like I had never cried before. The tears were like a fountain. I felt as if I were a part of a Pieta that endured throughout history. The tears just flowed, but they weren't my tears alone. I was joined with all the Rachels crying for their children throughout history, and as I cried with them, the loneliness was flushed out of me. It was a welcome catharsis.

I learned then that it was the loneliness of my pain that had kept me locked in mourning. Now I knew I was not alone in this searing loss of children. I had touched and been touched by a millennia of mothers, and in sharing our pain, I lost the loneliness and ended the mourning.

We receive many signs that God loves us. For me, one of those signs was a phone call from a friend that responded to a deep desire of mine and led to an enormous healing. I didn't know then why I felt such a strong desire to go to the Holy Land. But I think it was a God-force moving me to look where I would find the place that held healing for me. As for the phone call that offered a free trip to the Holy Land—well, there's no way this could be relegated to chance.

I came back and my life was changed, altered for the better. I didn't mourn Peter on the third anniversary of his death, I celebrated his life.

CHRIST WITHIN

Jeanette Blonigen Clancy

About fifteen years ago I was spiritually distressed by the conviction that Christian revelation could not possibly be the best or only revelation, that Christian claims to being the one religion founded by God could not possibly be true. At the same time I was convinced of the worth of my Christian heritage.

What to believe? How to pray? What words to use? I needed an intellectual foundation to support my daily conversations with the Presence I depended upon. I needed a system of thought.

Over the years many aids for building my own system of thinking about the Holy came to me. Perhaps the most helpful were the works of Carl Jung and his understanding of Christ.

Jung spoke a lot about spiritual maturity or, in his terms, about the union of ego with the unconscious or making known what was unknown. Spiritual growth means waking up to our total selves and becoming complete individuals. It can be described as centering or self-realization or growing awareness. Related terms are *gnosis* and *enlightenment* and *holiness* (wholeness).

A teacher and writer whose goal is to bridge traditional Christianity with the eclectic spiritual trends of today, Jeanette Blonigen Clancy lives in the very Catholic county of Stearns in Minnesota.

For Christians the most significant term Jung had for spiritual maturity was incarnation. Spiritual growth is incarnation because it is the process of God—divine Energy– becoming incarnate or embodied in us. In that process we find our higher Self.

The Self is total human potential, the hidden, whole person in us, the greater and future self. It is both the force urging us to wholeness and the goal of spiritual maturity–both source and goal. The Self is the image of God imprinted on the soul, the ultimate purpose to reach for, the highest value for which we sacrifice. Readers can see here the similarity to descriptions of Christ. Indeed, Jung said that the Christ is a symbol of this interior reality in each soul.

The Self or Christ is "the first-born of all creatures" in whom, through whom, and for whom "everything in heaven and on earth was created," and "in whom all things hold together," as stated in Colossians 1:15-20. What Colossians states about Christ, the Book of Wisdom states about Sophia–that she was with God at the creation (9:9). Scripture scholars tell us that the figure of Christ resembles the figure of Sophia or Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible. The two symbols, one female, one male, come from the same archetype. Both Christ and Sophia, said Jung, represent the God within every person.

The surprising thing is that a whole school of Christians said this as early as the second century. Gnostic Christians, who were driven out of the mainstream Church, taught that Christ stands for God in us. Gnostic writings, which appealed greatly to Jung, state that one who attains gnosis becomes "no longer a Christian, but a Christ." The Gospel of Philip teaches: "You saw the spirit, you became spirit. You saw Christ, you

became Christ . . . What you see you shall become."

In the Gospel of Thomas Jesus says, "I am not your master." And he says, "Whoever will drink from my mouth will become as I am, and I myself will become that person, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him." In another gnostic writing the disciple Matthew asks Jesus to show the "place of life" or the "pure light." Jesus answers, "Everyone [of you] who has known himself has seen it."

Jung explained that the myth of Christ originated in archetypal projections onto Jesus of Nazareth. There was a magnetic affinity between the man behind the Christ image and the unconscious energies of those drawn to him. Jesus Christ, then, corresponds to the ideal in every psyche, the internal God image, the supreme archetype of wholeness. It is the God or Goddess projected onto a certain historical person. Christ is real all right. The religious symbol points to the inner unity of human with divine.

When we look at our religion from the perspective of other religions, we can see our own more clearly.

The freedom with which people make claims about Jesus makes it obvious that they are not bothering to be accurate about a particular, historical individual. When they say, "Jesus shows us how to live" they really mean their own convictions are guiding them. We often hear, "Christ taught us . . ." followed by some moral rule that did not come from the Nazarene. It comes, instead from an internal ideal. They can interpret Christ authoritatively because Christ lives within them.

The Upanishads of Hinduism teach something remarkably similar to this symbolic understanding of Christ. They tell us that to realize *Brahman* refers to universal divinity or God, while *Atman* or *Self* refers to individual divinity or Christ. So the same relationship is suggested in Hinduism as in Christianity. As God is to Christ, so Brahman is to Atman or Self.

The close correspondence between Christian and Hindu symbols led Ravi Ravindra, an Indian Hindu, to a love for the Gospel of John, which for him "represents the Christian Veda par excellence." In a *Parabola* article, he stated he is "an outsider to the Christian tradition" but "much moved" by the gospel. He has read it many times and stated it "always leaves me in an uplifted internal state; I feel myself called by a mysterious and higher voice."

Ravindra understood Jesus Christ as the higher Self in everyone. This is the "only son of God" or "the Word that was in the Beginning with God." Jesus became a "transmitting conduit" for God so that the gospel can have him say, "the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself but the Father that dwelleth in me." He could say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

Ravindra named Krishna as the comparable "incarnate God" in Hinduism. He warned against limiting spiritual expression to one particular mode, calling it a sin against the Holy Spirit. Insisting on an exclusive savior as Christians do, wrote Ravindra, is "based on a misunderstanding of the sacred texts, by interpreting at the surface what is spoken from the depth, and is not worthy of Jesus Christ." He pointed out that the sacred literature of all religions separates "the spiritual, inner, and symbolical way of understanding from the material, outer, and literal one."

Michael Christensen

The correspondence of Hindu and Christian symbols excites me because it helps to put Christianity in its rightful place alongside other spiritual traditions. A similar parallel has been drawn between the Christ and the Buddha, and myriad similarities have been indicated between the story of Christ and the stories of other religious heroes.

When we look at our religion from the perspective of other religions, we can see our own more clearly. And we have to acknowledge that to hold one's own image of God for God, for the Vastness, is idolatry, though it be against the idols of other religions.

My personal spiritual life has been enriched by the replacement of literal belief with a symbolic understanding. It helps, for instance, to give meaning to the cross.

The movement toward becoming more complete individuals–becoming Christ–never ends, and this growing whole is painful for us. It is hard work to live fully our destiny. There is a continual dying and being reborn on our way to spiritual maturity. Anyone who intends to become whole has to die to the previous self, has to go the way of the cross, wrote Jung. We are not saved by the vicarious suffering of a certain historical figure. We have to go through this pain ourselves and the suffering Christ symbolizes our pain.

Authentic suffering gives us vision and depth and wisdom and compassion and nobility. Before we are broken open and enlarged with unbearable anguish, we cannot assimilate whatever insight is needed. "What is to give light must endure burning," said Viktor Frankl.

So the imitation of Christ does not mean imitating Jesus' past external life, but facing up to our responsi-

bility as humans. The suffering Christ is *our* suffering. Turning the ideal we should follow into an external object of worship keeps it from reaching deep down into us and transforming us.

This understanding of the suffering Christ does not invalidate the entire tradition. Uncomplicated, literal faith has provided powerful symbols to guide individual lives. The internalized myth calls us to responsibility. Therein lies its healing power.

Going Against the Grain

Pema Chodron

In order to feel compassion for others, we have to feel compassion for ourselves. In particular, to care about people who are fearful, angry, jealous, overpowered by addictions of all kinds, arrogant, proud, miserly, selfish, mean—you name it—to have compassion and to care for these people, means not to run from the pain of finding these things in ourselves. In fact, our whole attitude toward pain can change. Instead of fending it off and hiding from it, we could open our hearts and allow ourselves to feel that pain, feel it as something that will soften and purify us and make us far more loving and kind.

Tonglen practice is a method for connecting with suffering—ours and that which is all around us—everywhere we go. It is a method for overcoming our fear of suffering and for dissolving the tightness of our hearts. Primarily it is a method for awakening the compassion that is inherent in all of us, no matter how cruel or cold we might seem to be.

Pema Chodron is Abbot of Gampo Abbey in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. She has recently been named one of nine acharyas, or senior teachers, of the Shambhala community. This article is from When Things Fall Apart, *by Pema Chodron,* *© 1997. Reprinted by arrangement with Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boston.*

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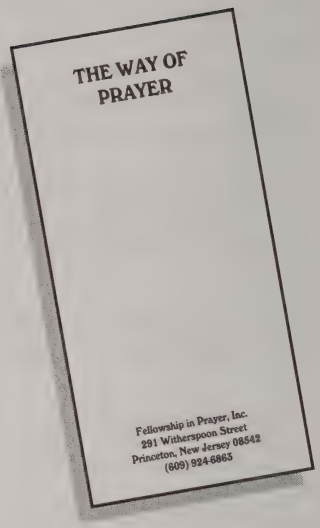

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Please use this space to tell us your thoughts about this publication, *Sacred Journey.*

We begin the practice by taking on the suffering of a person whom we know to be hurting and wish to help. For instance, if we know of a child who is being hurt, we breathe in with the wish to take away all of that child's pain and fear. Then, as we breathe out, we send happiness, joy, or whatever would relieve the child. This is the core of the practice: breathing in others' pain so they can be well and have more space to relax and open—breathing out, sending them relaxation or whatever we feel would bring them relief and happiness.

Often, however, we can't do this practice because we come face to face with our own fear, our own resistance or anger, or whatever our personal pain happens to be just then.

At that point we can change the focus and begin to do *tonglen* for what we are feeling and for millions of others just like us who at that very moment are feeling exactly the same stuckness and misery. Maybe we are able to name our pain. We recognize it clearly as terror or revulsion or anger or wanting to get revenge. So we breathe in for all the people who are caught with that same emotion and we send out relief or whatever opens up the space for ourselves and all those countless others. Maybe we can't name what we're feeling. But we can feel it—a tightness in the stomach, a heavy darkness, or whatever. We simply contact what we are feeling and breathe in, take it *in*—for all of us and send *out* relief to all of us.

People often say that this practice goes against the grain of how we usually hold ourselves together. Truthfully, this practice *does* go against the grain of wanting things on our own terms, wanting everything to work out for ourselves no matter what happens to the others. The practice dissolves the walls we've built around

our hearts. It dissolves the layers of self-protection we've tried so hard to create. In Buddhist language, one would say that it dissolves the fixation and clinging of ego.

Tonglen reverses the usual logic of avoiding suffering and seeking pleasure. In the process, we become liberated from a very ancient prison of selfishness. We begin to feel love both for ourselves and others; we begin to take care of ourselves and others. *Tonglen* awakens our compassion and introduces us to a far bigger view of reality. It introduces us to the unlimited spaciousness of *shunyata*. By doing the practice, we begin to connect with the open dimension of our being. At first this allows us to experience things as not such a big deal and not so solid as they seemed before.

Tonglen can be done for those who are ill, those who are dying or have died, those who are in pain of any kind. It can be done as a formal meditation practice or right on the spot at any time. We are out walking and we see someone in pain—right on the spot we can begin to breathe in that person's pain and send out relief. Or we are just as likely to see someone in pain and look away. The pain brings up our fear or anger; it brings up our resistance and confusion. So on the spot we can do *tonglen* for all the people just like ourselves, all those who wish to be compassionate but instead are afraid—who wish to be brave but instead are cowardly. Rather than beating ourselves up, we can use our personal stuckness as a stepping stone to understanding what people are up against all over the world. Breathe in for all of us and breathe out for all of us. Use what seems like poison as medicine. We can use our personal suffering as the path to compassion for all beings.

When you do *tonglen* on the spot, simply breathe in

Tom Dunham

and breathe out, taking in pain and sending out spaciousness and relief.

When you do *tonglen* as a formal meditation practice, it has four stages:

1. First, rest your mind briefly, for a second or two, in a state of openness or stillness. This stage is traditionally called flashing on absolute *bodhichitta*, or suddenly opening to basic spaciousness and clarity.

2. Second, work with texture. Breathe in a feeling of hot, dark, and heavy—a sense of claustrophobia—and breathe out a feeling of cool, bright, and light—a sense of freshness. Breathe in completely, through all the pores of your body and breathe out, radiate out, completely through all the pores of your body. Do this until it feels synchronized with your in- and out-breath.

3. Third, work with a personal situation—any painful situation that is real to you. Traditionally you begin by doing *tonglen* for someone you care about and wish to help. However, as I described, if you are stuck, you can do the practice for the pain you are feeling and simultaneously for all those just like you who feel that kind of suffering. For instance, if you are feeling inadequate, you breathe that in for yourself and all the others in the same boat, and you send out confidence and adequacy or relief in any form you wish.

4. Finally, make the taking in and sending out bigger. If you are doing *tonglen* for someone you love, extend it out to those who are in the same situation as your friend. If you are doing *tonglen* for someone you see on television or on the street, do it for all the others in the same boat. Make it bigger than just that one person. If you are doing *tonglen* for all those who are feeling the anger or fear or whatever that you are trapped in, maybe that's big enough. But you could go further in all these cases. You could do *tonglen* for people you consider to be your enemies—those who hurt you or hurt others. Do *tonglen* for them, thinking of them as having the same confusion and stuckness as your friend or yourself. Breathe in their pain and send them relief.

Tonglen can extend infinitely. As you do the practice, gradually over time your compassion naturally expands and so does your realization that things are not as solid as you thought. As you do this practice, gradually at your own pace, you will be surprised to find yourself more and more able to be there for others even in what used to seem like impossible situations.

Humility at Valaam Monastery

John Oliver

Deep in a northern Russian forest of jade and brown, far from any hint of civilization, Valaam monastery sinks into the seasons of the year as it has for a thousand years before. Two hundred monks labor in this place that rests on an island four hundred miles north of St. Petersburg, and an immeasurable distance from the Western world. Valaam is accessible only by ferry boats that must cross wide Lake Ladoga, and the lake isn't always cooperative. The trees, plants, animals, water, air, even soil, and the whole life cycle here in this wilderness flourish without the stains of overpopulation or industry. It is quiet here, and these quiet roots run deep. The spiritual paradox of Valaam is that this place is peaceful but not without violence.

In this world, the treasure of stillness requires a fierce guarding. Remember, it is not a flimsy sign but a flaming sword that protects the Garden of Eden. A verse in the Gospel according to St. Matthew puts it best: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the

John Oliver travels as a professional musician and is employed by the United Methodist Publishing House. He joined the Orthodox Church in 1992 and in 1994 he traveled to Russia to help renovate Valaam Monastery, founded in the late 900's.

violent take it by force." One patristic interpretation of that passage is that the Christian life is not for the faint of heart. The renunciation of self, the taking up one's cross, the salvation work of "fear and trembling," these are soldier-images that suggest an ascetic struggle is needed if we are to enter fully into the journey of defeat and victory that is the Christian life. Defeat can bring humility; and victory, joy. The monks at Valaam are a band of fierce fighters who sing and pick wildflowers. During my four weeks at the monastery, the fullness of life there revealed some gaping holes in my own.

I was told to "enter in" to the monastic cycle of services. As a young American, I do not "enter in," I observe. But I did what I could as often as I could with as much devotion as I could. It took a few days to lay down my resistance and accept that this is how they do things here, indeed, this is how they have always done things. Wake with the sun, offer prayers in the sanctuary, eat, labor, more prayers, more labor, a bit more food, a walk in the woods, more prayers into the night. The Christian year is built upon the Christian day, which is built upon the Christian hour and the Christian moment. When it was time to pray, we prayed. When it was time to eat, we ate. When it was time to play, we played. The civil war between what my spirit craved and what my flesh would settle for eased as the days passed. Monastic life has a rhythm and I wanted to learn it. Or, at least, I wanted to absorb enough of it so that I would never forget it but spend the rest of my life trying to get it back. It's a bit like pruning a small shoot of a plant and then planting the shoot in soil elsewhere so that it will grow into a life of its own.

Then, a key thing happened during the Divine Liturgy one Sunday morning–during the Little Entrance, or, that moment when the Gospel is carried in the uplifted hands of the priest before the people. The sanctuary is dark and cool. Candlelight illuminates the smoke of incense into silver scarves stretching toward the ceiling. There is quiet movement around the long cement room as candles are lit and icons are venerated by monks, novices, pilgrims, and members of a tiny village nearby. Then there is the chanting; this music that has been seasoned by centuries of honored use resonates within my deepest places. I stand very still. The chant, so beautiful, is offered as one sound, no monk louder than another. The language of the service is Slavonic but, in this moment, we are deeper than language. The door on the far left of the iconostasis opens and the monks and celebrants bring the Gospel into the view of the people. The people bow; I strain my neck to observe. And there is the difference.

I am trapped in questions such as: "How do I feel about this?" "What does this do for me?"

Our culture in America is in a passionate love affair with itself. Our unbridled pursuit of personal happiness and our worship of individualism have birthed a world view entirely inadequate to receive the mysteries of God. I am a product of this culture and have offered myself to it. Its world view discolors my own. Certainly there are good and honorable qualities of our culture but they are not the qualities toward which I naturally gravitate. I am thoroughly American in that life is lived on my terms; I am thoroughly Christian in

that I believe it shouldn't be. Rebellion is geographical, of course; it is present in all humans everywhere. But as I've studied the Holy Scriptures I have noticed my tendency to want to master, rather than to be mastered. Consider this passage from *The Communion of Love* by Matthew the Poor, a monk and spiritual father in the Monastery of St. Macarius in the Egyptian desert:

> There are two ways of reading [the Holy Scriptures]: The first is when a man reads and puts himself and his mind in control of the text, trying to subject its meaning to his own understanding and then comparing it with the understanding of others. The second is when a man puts the text on a level above himself and tries to bring his mind into submission to its meaning, and even sets the text up as a judge over him, counting it as the highest criterion.

Notice the difference? When I come to the Word of God on my own terms I am trapped in questions such as: "How do I feel about this?" "What does this do for me?" "How does this satisfy my understanding?" "What argument can I win with this information?" If my desire to learn and apply the practical truths of Holy Scripture is disconnected from the Holy Tradition of the Church and left to my own clever thinking, it can deteriorate into treating the Bible as the brightest gold on my throne or the heaviest weapon in my arsenal. But there at Valaam, in the precious hush of the ancient Divine Liturgy, the Holy Scriptures were held high above bowed heads and bended knees. These Or-

Michael Christensen

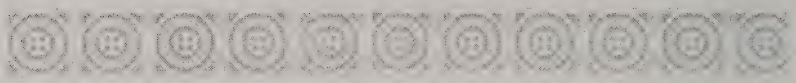
thodox Christians chose the only attitude appropriate for a people before their God: humility. And as an Orthodox Christian living here in a culture where humility is dismissed as a sign of weakness, I was blessed with the sacred exposure to another way of doing things.

The violence at Valaam monastery is the violence of spiritual warfare. And it is the violence I will carry with me when I leave Valaam if I ever want to live at peace with God, with my neighbor, and with myself. It is the renunciation of those selfish parts of me so that I may become more like the loving Christ; it is the taking up of my cross so that the comfort of the Holy Spirit is made known; it is the salvation work of laying down my arrogance so that I may draw near to the Holy Scriptures in the context of the Church the way a dying man draws near to the only medicine that can save him. I do not have a clear sense of how to do this, of how to become this man of whom I caught a glimpse at the monastery. I do know, however, that it begins with learning how to bow in humility to the Lord Jesus rather than strain my neck to observe all the interesting things he can do for me.

As the monks and celebrants carry the Gospel to the altar, I shift my weight from one foot to the other. This is the eighth consecutive hour of services and in traditional Orthodox Churches there are no pews. Benches line the walls of the sanctuary for the elderly and infirm and those who need a break from standing. But most of us stand; we stand like soldiers. I observe the old women, the *babushkas*, who are thrice my age but have none of my impatience. I observe the aroma of the incense that is the dried sap from some of those ancient trees outside. I observe the candles that give

light to the sanctuary and that shine with the names of people offered in prayer to God, some of whom are praying for us. I observe the icons, the windows of heaven, that incarnate the lives of saints, and I wonder if they observe me. The liturgy carries on peacefully and invites each of us to participate in the worship of God. I reflect for a moment that at one time in Church history, a person could not be tonsured a monk or nun unless he or she had the entire Book of Psalms memorized. "Well," I think to myself, "I know half of the Twenty-third Psalm." I decide it is time to stop thinking. I decide it is time to enter.

ILLUMINATIONS



Life is this simple. We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time. This is not just a fable or a nice story. It is true. If we abandon ourselves to God and forget ourselves, we see it sometimes, and we see it maybe frequently. God shows Himself everywhere, in everything–in people and in things and in nature and in events. It becomes very obvious that God is everywhere and everything and we cannot be without Him. It's impossible. The only thing is that we don't see it.

Thomas Merton
(from an audiotaped lecture, 1965)

A man cannot enter into the deepest center of himself and pass through that center into God, unless he is able to pass entirely out of himself and empty himself and give himself to other people in the purity of a selfless love.

Thomas Merton
New Seeds of Contemplation

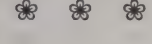
When all things return to the One, even gold loses its value. But when the One returns to all things, even the pebbles sparkle.

John Wu
The Golden Age of Zen

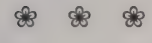
So it was you all along.
Everyone I ever loved, it was you.
Everything decent or fine that ever happened to me,
everything that made me reach out and try to be better,
it was you all along.

C. S. Lewis

Where is the solitary retreat,
With fresh water and no overgrowth?
Even the moon is a public light,
So what is the use of claiming
something as "yours?"



What is helpful to one
May cause another pain,
As when the moon rises,
The evening flowers open,
the lotuses close.

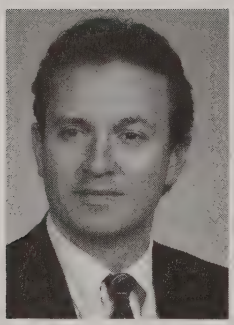


A hen at rest lays many eggs.
A peacock, when still, has a handsome tail.
A gentle horse has a swift pace.
Quietness is the sign of a sage.

Nagarjuna Pandit
Elegant Sayings

The Struggling Sea Gull

J. Jerome Smith



On a lovely Sunday morning in August my nine-year-old daughter and I were surf fishing in the warm, waist-deep, coastal waters about one hundred yards off a tiny island in the Gulf of Mexico. Although we were catching speckled trout abundantly, Katheryne insisted that we stop fishing and wade over to the island to pick up some seashells. Reluctantly, I promised her that after landing two more fish we could go. After stashing three more fish in the creel, I was reminded once again of my promise, and obediently followed her to the beach. Wading ashore, she marveled at the abundance of sea-

Dr. Smith was born and raised in Lafayette, LA and is a graduate of the University of Southwestern Louisiana and Louisiana State University School of Dentistry. He is co-founder of The Mexico Medical/Dental Project, in Mexico. Dr. Smith has been a member of the St. Francis Prayer Group for the past eight years and enjoys running, fishing, hunting, reading, computers, and spending time with his wife, Germaine, and daughters.

shells and hermit crabs that adorned the sands of this little barrier island beach. She scrambled about in wide-eyed wonder, happily filling both hands to overflowing with shells. I spotted an empty plastic gallon jug, cut off the top, and brought it to her to store her growing new seashell collection.

As we continued to move down the island, hundreds of sea gulls were startled by our presence and hastily flew away. However, there before us was a very young sea gull who remained. He was trying to fly away but could not. Something was wrong. Every time the young creature attempted to take off, he would reach an altitude of about twelve inches, then abruptly fall back to the sand. The frantic gull did this repeatedly, with increasing frequency, as we approached. Then Katheryne asked, "Daddy, what's wrong with that bird?" I replied, "Looks like it might have a broken wing. If so, I'm afraid it's going to die of hunger, since it won't be able to glide over the waters to scoop up little fish."

As we got nearer, however, it was obvious that his wings were okay, but there was something else wrong. I reached down for the bird only to find out that it had become entangled in fishing line. Gingerly I cupped the little fellow in my hands and picked him up. This is the first time the poor bird has been touched by a human, I remember thinking as I felt its pulse racing in fear. No wonder it's scared to death. Using the fingernail clippers that hung from my neck, I clipped the clear fishing line knotted around its left foot and lifted the bird upward toward the heavens. As I opened my hands, the bird flew off. We both watched it as it sped for the horizon, and when we could no longer see it, I glanced down at my little girl and said, "Now, Katheryne, this bird is free and will live. If we hadn't

come along and helped, he would surely have died." The smile that spread on her face told me how proud she was of what we had done. It was such a special feeling that the two of us had shared. And that sweet and innocent smile of hers was more reward than I could have ever hoped for, having stopped fishing those few magic moments to follow her to that enchanted stretch of seashore. What a delight! . . . to watch her excitedly gather seashells with a child's sense of excitement and innocent wonder that seems to evade us as we grow older . . . to see her face after the little gull soared up into the sky, free from the bondage of the fishing line, with another chance at life.

We continued to stroll down the beach, and several moments later she shouted, "Look Daddy, there's the sea gull we helped!" as the bird flapped over our heads. I turned to her and said, "Yeah, I guess he came back just to say "Thank you for helping me."

That special moment that God granted me and my daughter that golden, unforgettable Sunday morning danced in my mind for the remainder of the day, and right through church that same evening. In fact, I couldn't put the vision of that bird out of my mind, nor get the lump out of my throat. In prayer, I pondered with joy the truth that God really created fish to swim, birds to fly . . . and human beings to share in God's glory on earth, and more fully some day in heaven. God offers us freedom to be happy, joyful, childlike, and peace-filled, if only we will open our hearts to his ineffable grace, and surrender our lives completely to God. The elation that suffuses our being when we allow God to sever those binding strings of attachment to the world and its mundane concerns can be described only as *true freedom*. Absent that release

Darlene Prestbo

from attachments, our souls certainly will starve, because we cannot be nourished with divine life while hopelessly tethered to the earth.

After service, I wrote the following prayer:

> Today, dear Lord, I thank you for following my child and me along one of life's shores to discover a grace-filled mystery

that still warms my heart in the memory. I thank you for allowing me to see myself in that young sea gull that morning. Reflecting back, I recall the countless times I was hopelessly strapped to this earth, just like the poor bird . . . and despite strong resolve and effort, was helpless to break loose from the ties that bound me.

Each time I struggled to rise above my earthly attachments, concerns, afflictions, sorrows, worries, or limitations, I invariably faltered and fell . . . just like the little sea gull. I am so grateful You stayed beside me during my own struggles and never gave up on me. I bow my head and offer a prayer of humble thanksgiving for Your part in "cutting my invisible strings" and letting me soar freely, just like the little sea gull. Yet again Your gentleness and inspiration overwhelm me, and the simple ways You use to reach this man, who continues searching for You in the complexity of his daily existence on this earth, never fail to humble me. I stand before you truly blessed, and thankful now to be free, because of your love for me . . . just like the little sea gull.

Psalm of the Unsure Believer

Carol Siemering

O Infinite Everything
I think
maybe
O Mighty One
or shepherd
or Queen of Heaven
or Mother of Sorrows
or Mercy
Creator
of the day
and night
of heartache
that is physically felt
of inexplicable joy
of starstuff
and forget-me-not blue
You who were named
now unnamed
Whoever

Carol Siemering is the director of the hotline for all recipients of Welfare and Food Stamps in the state of Massachusetts and a member of the Grail, an international women's movement concerned with spiritual, educational, cultural, environmental, and social issues.

Julie Keefer is founder of MorningStar Adventures, Inc. an ecumenical and interfaith retreat ministry in Le Roy, Michigan.

Whatever
knits together
all the major and minor
bits of this universeI sing you something
like praise
And because somewhere
in my bones
I still find myself
Child
I give myself over
to marvelous You.

Source of All Being

Julie D. Keefer

Father Sky, Mother Earth, Sister Spirit
Holy, Holy, Holy,
is your Dance of Intimacy.

Your Kin-dom come,
Your world be One in us
and in everyone.

Give us this day
what we need for nurture,
as we open ourselves
to You.

We ask your grace
to accept forgiveness for our failures in love,
as we forgive those
who fail to love us rightly.

Protect us from evil,
and give us the strength to grow
in times of trial.
Grant us the courage
to enter your cosmic Dance,
for only in the intimacy of our dance with You
do we know the
joy
of never-ending communion.

✡ ✡ ✡ ✡

In that which we share,
let us see the common prayer of humanity.
In that which we differ,
let us wonder at the freedom of humankind.
Jewish prayer

✡ ✡ ✡ ✡

O God!
Make good that which is between us,
unite our hearts
and guide us to paths of peace.
Muslim prayer

Morning

Catherine B. Miklitsch

Birds rustle before dawn,
encouraged by summer's warmth
I rise with them, drink coffee, eat bread.

Sustenance is, after all, necessity.
I need birds and bread. I crave
the notion of a cardinal.

By daylight its color transcends
all that I see, beckoning me
to look upward.

Startled by indifference
to my needs, yet handing me
a palette of soft, feathered browns,

and tangerine, I find nourishment
for the soul. I know God experimented
with peacocks and macaws before

Catherine B. Miklitsch has poetry and fiction credits in several small periodicals, belongs to two writing groups, is a wife, mother and grandmother. She resides in Lewiston, NY.

scattering with one thrust
of his enormous reach
these red birds

to scratch the surface of the day.

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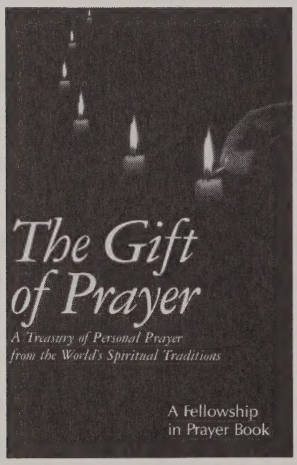

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